

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As we come into a New Year, I want to change the focus of my monthly pastoral letters and instead move the subject of them toward the word of God. In writing each month my hope will be that you will take what I write and engage further with the Scriptures by delving into them and so find understanding and meaning for your life today, whatever your circumstances.

In 2024, I am using Selwyn Hughes excellent *Every Day with Jesus - One Year Bible*, and the first reading on January 1st started, '*In the beginning God...*', the opening from Genesis. Hughes rightly states the **primary focus in life should be knowing God better**, but more often than not our desire is to know ourselves better. Even in the church, we could rightly be accused of too often answering questions people are asking about life's challenges and apparent injustices and inequalities. But as Hughes points out, '*the real problem may be that people are not asking the right questions. In todays' church we are far too person-centred and not God-centred*'. He also says that '*if God is not our primary focus, then everything else will soon get out of focus*'.

So my prayer is that these monthly notes will help you focus primarily upon the goodness of God and His intention for your life and the world, rather than upon your concerns for your life and the world.

Toward the end of 2023 when on retreat I felt the Lord prompt me that we must consider **His mercy** to us. As I pondered, Psalm 13 came to mind...

How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

<sup>2</sup> How long must I wrestle with my thoughts  
and day after day have sorrow in my heart?

How long will my enemy triumph over me?

<sup>3</sup> Look on me and answer, LORD my God.

Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death,

<sup>4</sup> and my enemy will say, "I have overcome him,"

and my foes will rejoice when I fall.

<sup>5</sup> **But I trust in your unfailing love;  
my heart rejoices in your salvation.**

<sup>6</sup> **I will sing the LORD's praise,  
for he has been good to me. (NIV)**

Verse 5 in the New King James Translation states... '*But I have trusted in Your **mercy***'; and in Young's Literal Translation it is translated... '*And I, in Thy **kindness** I have trusted*'.

**God's unfailing love is evident in his kindness and mercy,** through all time and is without end.

When you come to know the Lord, to know the truth of God then what should happen is that you change. It starts with repentant hearts that accept the saving grace of Jesus, but the Lord will not let it stop there. In His mercy He provides the Holy Spirit to guide, to comfort and to help the follower of Christ continue the journey that starts with a repentant heart. Our repentance is essential, and we will find ourselves blessed by the righteousness imputed to the believer by Christ, but the process continues through the ongoing sanctification of the believer.

Sanctification occurs at justification, being the one-time moment and work of God that results in the declaration of 'not guilty' before God because of the work undertaken by Jesus Christ on the cross. Our sanctification occurs at this time, and is the beginning of our Christian lives with the initial moral change that breaks the power of sin over us and of our love of sin, for by Jesus we are no longer under the dominion of sin. But sanctification also remains an ongoing work! It is an ever continuing work that reorientates our desires and develops within us a desire for righteousness and holiness, taking a life time until at death the believer is made perfect, since nothing unclean can enter heaven (Revelation 21.v27). And then, when Christ comes again the body, soul and spirit will be perfected in glorified bodies, which Paul writes of in 1Corinthians 15.35-39.



So, we can understand **God's mercy** in this deeper sense by His work: calling His children, those who know Him and are known by Him, to do His will and work His good pleasure

(Philippians 2.12-13); through Jesus Christ the crucified and risen Saviour, the one who is the perfecter of our faith; and by the work of the Holy Spirit who is the primary instrument of our sanctification and producer of the fruit of the Spirit.

**God's mercy** is a deep strand of his enduring faithfulness to creation. As Christians, we should know we are deeply fallen, with 'Total Depravity' at our hearts as Calvinist reformed theology would say. Yet, despite our sinful hearts, God our creator's **mercy reaches down** into the evil root of humanity **and amongst it places His Son**, to not only die that we might be free from sin, but also to show and be the model of how human life ought to be.

When we come to the Scriptures of the Holy Bible, despite what academics might say, despite what some who maybe dis-constructing their theology say, despite that some might say the Bible is just another ancient religious text. Despite all that is said, when we come to the Word of God, we come to it as Christians in the knowledge and light of Jesus. That He is at the beginning, middle and end of the Word of God. Jesus is the Alpha and Omega, so **when you fall upon the mercy of your maker, it is upon Jesus you fall**. When you seek wisdom from the Word of God you will find Jesus. When you pray for intervention, when you pray with thanks, when you lift others up to God in prayer, then in all your prayers it is Jesus who hears.

### **The mercy of God is found in Jesus. FULL STOP**

He is the way the truth and the life, and so believe that as Christians when we seek the mercy of the Lord in our lives and in the life of the world, it is to Jesus we come. The church needs to stop being apologetic about Jesus. Yes we must accept everyone's choice to be of no faith and other faiths, but never at the cost of denying the sovereignty, sufficiency, singular and exclusive nature of Jesus. For if we allow Jesus to be one of many ways to God, then



"I have come that they might have life" John 10:10

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we deny God himself. The God of Christian faith is the Trinitarian God – Father, Son and Spirit, and **in both the individuality and the oneness of the Trinity the mercy of God is evident.**

When the Lord spoke to Moses and gave instruction for the manufacture of the Ark of Covenant, one of the elements of it was the 'mercy seat'... "*You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold. Two cubits and a half shall be its length, and a cubit and a half its breadth.*" (Exodus 25.v17). He goes on to say... ***There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat,... I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel.*** (Exodus 25.v22). Today, we do not live under the old covenant but under a new promise, the New Covenant of God in Jesus Christ. **The mercy we require today is found in Jesus** and Jesus is found in the Word of the Bible, and by the power of Holy Spirit who helps us discern the Word of God.

So, as we venture into 2024, I encourage you to dive headlong into God's word. If it's all a bit new to you, use the resources we have available (just ask) - '*Our Daily Bread*' is an excellent resource for daily reflection. Or use TryPraying to reorient your prayer life. Or join a Life Group where God's word is shared and explored together. Of course, come to weekly worship, and if you miss it catch up with the GMC podcast. Finally, come to Encounter evening services (2<sup>nd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday at 6.30pm).

Whatever 2024 brings, my prayer is you will know the mercies of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit living in wonder at His glory every day.

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.* (Psalm 23.v6)

Your servant in Christ, *Pastor Mike* (Minister, GMC)

Are you in need of pastoral support?

Do you need prayer?

Do you want to support our kingdom work, or financially support the work of GMC?

For all matters contact Rev. Mike Weaver **OR** the Office

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